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Paternal Interactions in a Patriarchal Society

In the play Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare sets the play during the Elizabethan period, when women had very little rights. During this time, society was reserved and civilians often lived a conservative lifestyle. Women had no say over their marriages, which was provided by the parents and determined their child’s lifelong partner by what they view as the most suitable mate. This was based on family statuses and their offspring’s welfare. Juliet was once given some say in her marriage, unlike other families that lived in the same era because of her father’s liberal outlook on her marriage. However, in this scene it is revealed that Juliet’s father is practically forcing her to marry Paris and threatens to disown her. The interactions between Juliet and Capulet in act 3, scene 5 reveal that their relationship is untroubled when Juliet abides by her father’s will. However, once Capulet’s authority is defied, he uses his command to force Juliet into following his decision.

In the beginning of Romeo and Juliet, we were introduced to Capulet as a very kind father who respected his daughter’s choices. Juliet is introduced as a very obedient daughter who thinks highly of her father. Throughout the book both of their characters begin to change. In the start of this book, we see Capulet as a very loving, caring character who would do anything for his daughter. We can tell that he feels this way about her when he says, “ She’s the hopeful lady of my Earth.” (1.2. 15) This shows that he sees her as such a profound child. Juliet use to feel the same as be “daddy’s little girl.” But as soon as Juliet meets Romeo she fall head-over-heels in love with him. This is a huge change in Juliet’s personality. She goes from being the innocent daughter who obeyed her parents, now she is keeping a private matter that could change both families. We can see that Juliet has somewhat changed her personality with her father when she says, “ Good father, I beseech you on my knees, hear me with patience but to speak a word.” (3.5.164) This quote shows that even though she will not obey her father’s command she still does respect him. Even though she was trying to be respectful her father just could not understand. This led to the fall of their relationship, and then we can truly see the bad side of Capulet. Loosing her family and Romeo led to her shocking death.

Capulet’s character is one that has dramatically changed throughout the course of the play, as seen by his opinion regarding Juliet’s marriage. When Capulet was first introduced in act 1 scene 2, the impression given to the audience is that he is a caring and tolerant father. This is revealed when he is discussing Paris’s offer of marriage to Juliet. In response, he states, “My will to her consent is but a part.” (1.2.17), showing that he recognizes Juliet’s decision to be the most crucial in deciding her future. During this section, there is no implication to the audience whatsoever that Capulet may pressure Juliet into marriage. However, this is exactly what he does later in the play. After speculating that Juliet’s sorrow came from her cousin, Tybalt’s death, he imprudently arranges for her to be married to Paris. The original intentions can be interpreted as trying to help Juliet rid of her sadness, but this is immediately lost after he loses his temper. When Juliet refuses, his anger and fury is unleashed onto her, stating, “Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch!/I tell thee what: get thee to church o’ Thursday,/Or never after look me in the face.” (3.5.166-16). Within this line, Capulet basically insults Juliet and forces her into the marriage, with the ultimatum of being disowned. This type of mentality that Capulet has may give insight into the male ego, especially during the Elizabethan period. Fathers are thoughtful and attentive to their daughters, until their authority is challenged. Unfortunately, throughout trying to do what’s best for his daughter, he unwittingly becomes an accomplice to Juliet’s demise.

Shakespeare uses dramatic irony extensively in this scene to show off how Juliet’s relationship with her father turns for the worse in this scene. The audience, Juliet, and the Nurse are the only ones that know about Juliet’s marriage with Romeo. This creates a case of dramatic irony in the sense that Capulet and Lady Capulet do not know about this secret marriage, and this creates heavy complications in the scene and relationships with the characters, and is this secrecy between characters is one of the main reasons why Juliet’s relationship with her father deteriorates. “well, well, thou hast a careful father, child. One who, to put thee from thy heaviness, hath sorted out a sudden day of joy that thou expects not, nor I looked not for” (3.5.112). This quote shows off the enormous effect withheld information has created. Capulet thinks that he is making Juliet happy by marrying her off to a good man; he does not know that Juliet is already married to the man she loves and he is not making her feel any better. This dramatic irony leads to the rejection of proposed marriage by Juliet, and in turn, leads to the change in Capulet’s character and relationship with Juliet. From a caring attentive father to a tyrant that wields his patriarchal power to its full authority, “But fettle your fine joints ‘gainst Thursday next to go with Paris to Saint Peter’s church, or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage! You tallow face!” (3.5.158). This shows the gigantic change Capulet goes through just because of the dramatic irony and withheld information. Shakespeare uses this dramatic irony effectively to tense up the healthy relationship between father and daughter, as well as make the audience feel sympathetic for Juliet. We can see that Juliet is quite a timid character, as she does not tell her father the truth, and lets him walk all over her because he does not know the truth. She is afraid about what her father might think about her relationship with Romeo, and so worsens her already bad situation. Their relationship worsens gravely in this short interjection with dramatic irony, and shows off Juliet and Capulet’s real character.

The dialogue that Capulet and Juliet speak throughout the play shows the changing nature of their relationship. This began when Capulet’s caring essence allows Juliet the decision in who she marries. However, by act 3 scene 5, Capulet and Juliet were in conflict about whether to marry Paris or not. This shows that Capulet cares about Juliet, but does not always know what is best for her. Regrettably, his decision in forcing Juliet to marry Paris instigates the tragedy of Juliet and Romeo’s suicides. The decisions and choices that Capulet has made changed their relationship in a way that can never be mended again.